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# PERSONAL NAMES AMONG THE TIWI

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To sum up then the main points in the customs of the Tiwi connected with personal names, the outstanding features are these :—

- (1) Multiplicity of personal names.
- (2) Death renders tabu the names of the dead man.
- (3) Death renders tabu similar words in the language.
- (4) Death renders tabu names bestowed upon others by the dead man.
- (5) Method of coining names.
- (6) Tabu on names at certain times (e.g., childbirth, initiation).

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It is fairly evident from the facts cited in this paper that among the Tiwi at any rate a personal name is the absolute property of the person possessing it. Further than that, it is so identified with his personality that even the use of it by anyone else is resented by the owner. There is no space here to describe the theology of the Tiwi, but it must be pointed out that after the death of a man his spirit does not go with his body to the region of the dead, but wanders about the world in a form both invisible and malignant. Just as an individual when alive would resent the use of his name so too will his spirit and will be much more dangerous an enemy on account of his supernatural form. Spirits are not only malignant, they are also unreasonable, and whereas a live man would not quarrel with you for using an ordinary word resembling his name, his ghost is quite likely not to appreciate the difference. Hence the prohibition against similar words. While in touch with the unseen world it pays to be careful. But in dealing with the unseen world the Tiwi have a special language. This body of words has a sacredness of its own, it is a part of the spirit world itself. Therefore you may incur the enmity of a spirit by using his mundane name or some similar mundane word, but the use of a similar word in the sacred language cannot do any harm; the spirit will not get annoyed with you for using a spirit word, especially as you can only use it in any case on sacred occasions. Hence there is no tabu on similar words in the sacred language.

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This principle of the sacred language for use when in touch with supernatural situations also helps us to understand several other things. The birth of a child is, to a native, a most mysterious affair and the woman is regarded as being intimately in touch with the spirit world. Hence her name as part of herself is invested with a ghostly character and this is expressed by the tribe in treating her husband as if she did not exist, as if

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she were dead in fact and for the time being no longer his wife. She is in touch with the spirits and the result will be a child for her husband. Since he is too close to the mystery for comfort they abstain from mentioning it in his presence. 551 844

The result of the childbirth is a child and that child was recently a spirit. Therefore the name must come from the sacred language.

Initiation ceremonies also involve a very close contact with the spirit world. Initiation is a sacred rite and sacred names must be taken when passing through its various stages. When *Timalangkumi* is seized by men of his sister's husband's totem and yellow grease is smeared on his chest he ceases to be *Timalangkumi* and becomes *Maru-kumani*, a person in touch with unseen forces, and he therefore must have a sacred name. His previous name came from the sacred language, but this is a change of status and is expressed by giving him a new name, one that is only used on such occasions. 553 881

The fact that death renders sacred all the concepts closely associated with the dead man does no doubt play a large part in causing the tabu on names he has bestowed upon other people. There is I think another factor which is even more important in the causation of this particular tabu. When a man marries a widow he becomes to the tribe not the foster father of her children but the actual father. It cannot be pointed out too often that the Australian blackfellow does not distinguish physiological and social fatherhood. The new husband is married to the widow, he therefore must be the father of her children. Her children change their position in the tribe, and the function of the changing of their names is to show this change and the new social relationships that have been imposed upon them by it. It will be remembered in this connection that the husband changes the names of *all* the woman's children whether of her last husband or not, and also that words in either the sacred or the ordinary language which are similar in sound to the former names of the children do not become tabu. That is, it is a social not a sacred change of name. 553 587 768 593

It might be argued that the widow changes her status also, yet her name is not changed. But in point of fact she does not alter her status; her new husband is usually of the same clan as her last one, and frequently he is an actual brother of the dead man. In any case her new husband cannot change her name as she is not one of the people he can bestow names upon. Nor does her name mean to the tribe any relation to her 553